

Plants of Melbourne's Western Plains: a gardener's guide to the original flora.

Australian Plants Society, Keilor Plains Group Inc.

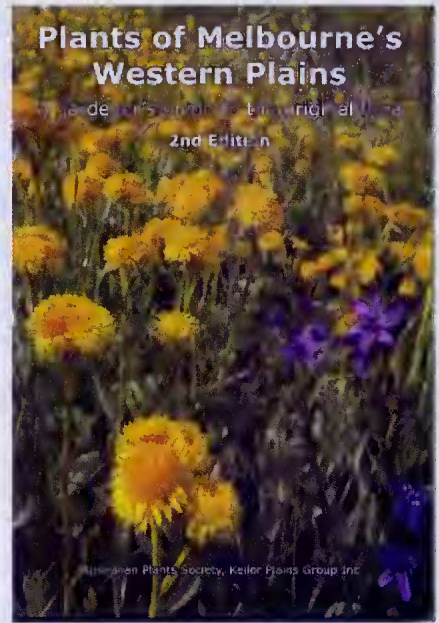
Publisher: APS, Keilor Plains Group Inc., 2012 2nd Edition. 224 pages, paperback, colour photographs. ISBN: 9780909830656 RRP \$19.95

Temperate native grasslands are Australia's most endangered ecosystems. So, you'd think that people would be really interested in their protection, management and cultivation. Well, you'd be right — up to a point. Field naturalists, indigenous gardening enthusiasts, and botanists have been very passionate about the flora for several decades, yet we continue to lose important habitat. And the conclusion has to be drawn that native grasslands just don't 'sell' when it comes to inspiring a broader audience.

Plants of Melbourne's Western Plains might just change that. For indigenous plant enthusiasts, it is a must-get second edition, produced by the Australian Plants Society. They won't be disappointed. But if ever there was a book to inspire the average city gardener to think about using their local plants, I think this is *that* book.

This is a superbly produced book that highlights the beauty of the indigenous flora of western Melbourne. The photography (often patchy in local flora books) is a highlight. As I write this review, I have page 4 open. It is my favourite image in the book. A detailed, yet artistic portrayal of the deep purple flowers of *Hardenbergia violacea* against a backdrop of creamy *Clematis microphylla* flowers. I'd pay twenty bucks just to have that image hanging on the wall of my study. A close second is found on page 6 – a close up of *Rytidosperma duttonianum*. A more beautiful photo of a grass at anthesis I have never seen. All the photos are well-framed, and the quality of the reproduction is of the highest order. I can't help but think it makes indigenous plants look very beautiful.

The book is more than a gardener's guide to the cultivation of the grasslands flora. There are excellent cultivation notes on the trees, shrubs, grasses, wildflowers and aquatic species of the western plains. I am sure that the 20-plus years of experience growing these plants by the APS



means the information is accurate and useful. Certainly for the species I know it seemed spot on.

But what I found really useful in this book is that it takes the time to introduce the reader to the landscape. Pages 10–31 cover the natural history of the western plains, the geology and climate. This gives a fascinating insight into the area. Given the rapid suburban expansion west of Melbourne, with burgeoning suburbs creeping over the former grasslands, such information is a timely reminder to readers concerning the type of 'wildness' that existed. The plains grasslands of Victoria, like those of the great prairies of the USA, were wild only 200 years ago, and we have almost lost that. This book does a good job of reminding us.

Section 2 (pp. 34–65) covers a topic that is neglected in many guides of this type: how

to actually garden with the plains plants. It includes subjects such as growing plants in containers, pruning, creating a native grass lawn, attracting animals to the garden. In this section, there could have been more shots of 'gardens' to showcase how good these plants can look when grown together. This is but a small oversight.

Section 3 (the bulk of the book) details the plants of the western plains and their cultivation. This is followed by the Appendices. This was a real treasure trove of information. Here there was information about indigenous plant suppliers (no point getting excited about growing these plants if you don't know where to buy

them), the vegetation types of the plains and where to see them (to get inspiration), what plants grow where in the landscape, and some suggestions for further reading.

This book will not only look great on your coffee table, but is also very useful. And it serves as a benchmark for how future indigenous planting guides might be written, with attention to detail, and a great passion for the flora.

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The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia: the definitive work on bird identification

by Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight, Edited by Sarah Pizzey

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The latest edition of Pizzey and Knight's *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* is as informative as it is attractive. Produced to aid in the identification of wild bird species in the field, the book provides information and illustrations of 842 bird species found on the Australian continent, its continental islands and its seas. This new edition accounts for the latest information relating to the taxonomy, distribution and classification of Australian birds, meaning 18 species are included in the guide for the first time.

As with past editions, each species is beautifully illustrated and accompanied by detailed text. The plumage is described of a typical adult and differences between males, females and juveniles are highlighted and can be compared back to illustrations for clarification. Outstanding markings are italicized and useful habits and behavioral features follow, for quick recognition in the field. The attention given to the differences between similar species is most valuable. Habitat, breeding season, voice, nest, range and status are described and an updated distribution map accompanies the text. Such extensive detail means this guide is bigger and

The definitive work on bird identification

THE FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA

